



INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME

19.02.2026

ÇAĞ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY of ARTS & SCIENCES
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
PSY 264 PSYCHOLOGY OF
CRIME
WEEK I

WHAT IS CRIME?

- If we are discussing criminal behavior, we must first know what ‘crime’ is.
- A fundamental principle of **realist perspectives** is that **crime is a real problem** and that **society should try to reduce** it.
- It is important to understand that any answer to this question is shaped by certain **social and political assumptions**.
- According to Siegel (2010), “crime is a **violation of social rules of conduct**, as interpreted and expressed in criminal law, reflecting **public opinion, traditional values** and the views of **those who currently hold** social and political power.”
- This definition discusses ‘violations of rules’, but it also discusses that these rules reflect current social values. Thus, there may have been actions in the past that were not considered serious enough by society to be considered crimes (e.g. stalking, marital rape or child abuse, which were not considered crimes at various times).
- Sometimes crimes may involve ‘**acts of omission**’, and a crime is defined as ‘**an act or omission punishable by law**’ (Muncie and McLaughlin, 2001).

WHAT IS CRIME?

- Crime is an action **punished by law** or an action or behavior that is accepted and clearly defined by the legislator as **harmful or dangerous to society**.
- A crime is a behavior that **violates social norms** in a society and is **contrary to majoritarian values**.
- A criminal is a person who commits **a criminal act, willingly or unwillingly**.
- According to Criminal Law, a crime is "an action punished by law" and in order for an action that violates rights and interests to be considered a crime, it must be punished by law.

DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

- Sometimes crime is also defined by the **reactions** it creates. **Deviant behaviors cause reactions in others.**
- Deviance includes behaviors that we might call crimes, but it is **broader in scope** and most societies consider it as "**strange, unacceptable behavior**" (Joyce, 2012).
- But the issue is **who defines what deviance is.**
- What is considered deviant now may not be so in the years to come. For example, many people considered people with mental illnesses to be deviant and persecuted them because they were believed to be possessed by the devil. We now understand mental illnesses much better.

CRIME AND TIME/PLACE RELATIONSHIP

- Adding to all this complexity are crimes that are internationally recognized as **wrongful acts** that should be **criminalized** (e.g., the International Criminal Court deals with crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes).
- When we put these together, we see that **crime is socially constructed**. Criminal law, and therefore crime, is **not static over time**. It changes over time and is therefore **based on what society considers right or wrong at any given time**.
- What is a 'crime' depends on **where and when** (in time period) it was committed.

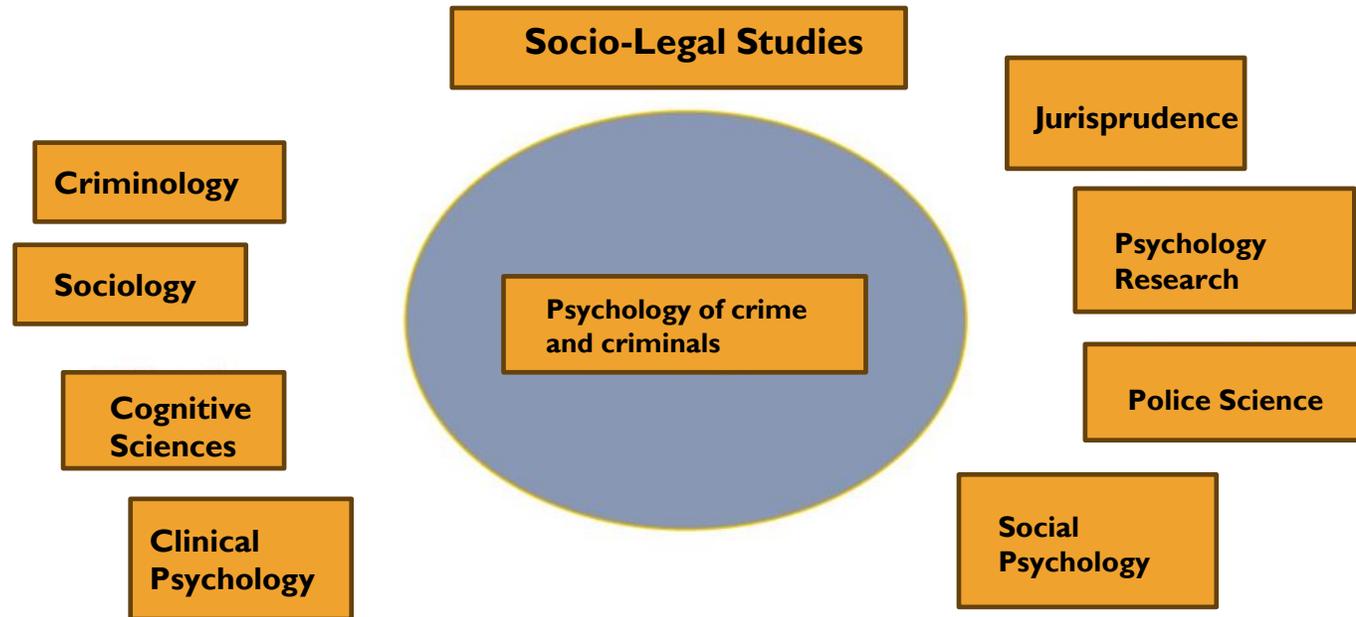
EVALUATION OF THE CRIME

- **Official statistics**
 1. number of crimes reported to the police
 2. number of crimes recorded and/or investigated by the police
 3. people arrested, cautioned or convicted of crimes
- It seems likely that many crimes go **unreported** and are **not investigated** by the police.
- **Dark figure of crime:** The number of crimes that are **not reported**, also refers to crimes that are **not known** to all parties or where law enforcement does **not accept** that the law has been broken.

EVALUATION OF THE CRIME

- **Crime surveys:** These are surveys of the general population. **Representative samples** of the population are questioned about their **own criminal experiences in the past 12 months** (e.g., petty theft, vandalism, verbal abuse, and minor assault). They do **not collect data on more serious crimes** such as murder and assault because these are relatively rare and therefore unlikely to occur in the sample in any given year.
- **Self-report reports of crime:** Question people **what crimes they have committed**. This is problematic because **people are unlikely to volunteer** incriminating information. However, this method has been used particularly youth delinquency and relatively for minor crimes.

DISCIPLINES CONTRIBUTING TO THE STUDY OF CRIME and CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY



UNDERSTANDING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

UNDERSTANDING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

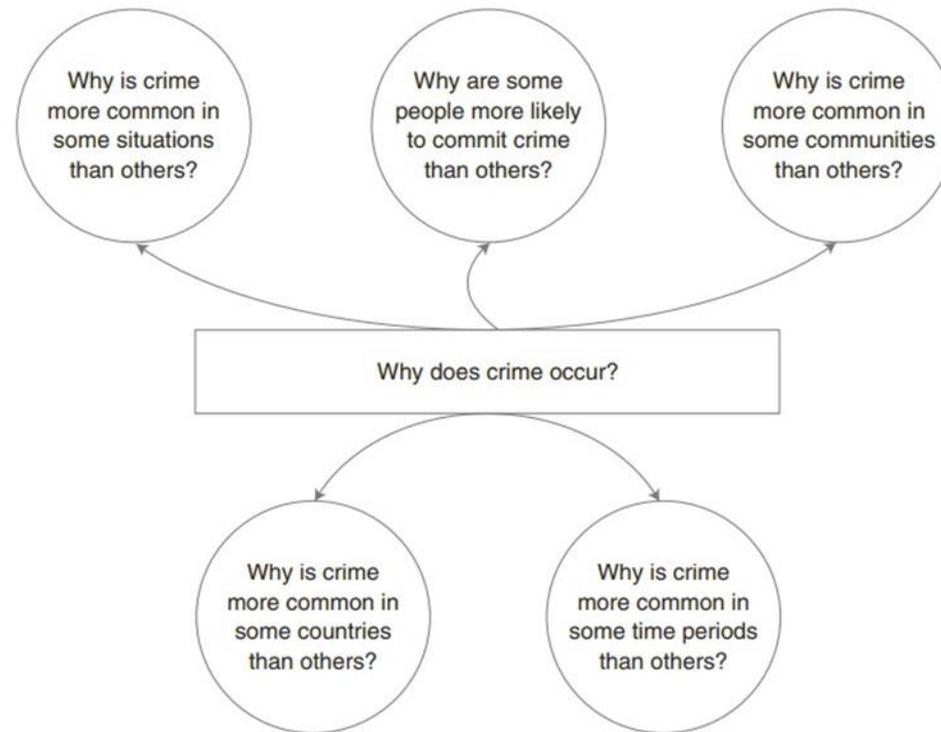


Figure 1.2 Understanding crime: what needs to be explained?

CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY

- 'Psychology' is the science of how people think, feel and behave, and is therefore concerned with explaining why people commit crimes.
- 'Criminal psychology' is an emerging field of psychology that involves the use of psychology to improve our understanding of the **causes and management of crime and legal problems.**
- The combination of psychology and criminology: Learning more about the **minds and motivations of criminals.**
- **'What drives people to do wrong?'**

TYPES OF CRIMES

- **Crimes against persons** (violent crimes): Murder, rape, sexual assault, injury, etc.
- **Crimes against property:** Theft, robbery, snatching, extortion, etc.
- **(Cross-border) organized crimes:** Drug/human/weapons/historical artifact smuggling, money laundering, illegal gambling, loan sharking, etc.
- **Terrorism and extremist crimes:** Religious terror, ecological terror, political terror, etc.
- **White-collar crimes:** Money laundering, fraud, embezzlement, corruption, tax evasion, forgery, bribery, etc.
- **Cyber crimes:** Cyber stalking, child pornography, identity fraud, cyber espionage, system takeover (hacking), etc.

BECCARIA AND CRIME RESEARCH



- Beccaria (1738-1794) was an Italian thinker whose work *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (1764) was based in the tradition of Enlightenment thought, which emphasised the power of reason (as opposed to appeals to divine powers) in solving problems.
- Beccaria's work is considered a milestone in the development of criminological thought. It is a short piece of writing, but it is a clear call for a systematic approach to understanding the problem of crime.
- It included suggestions for how societies should try to understand and respond to crime.
- Stigmatizing, flogging and death were common in the 18th century (people were sentenced to death for forging a receipt worth £160).

BECCARIA AND CRIME RESEARCH

- Beccaria argued that society's response to crime should be much more rational and controlled.
- For Beccaria, the individual was a rational agent who could act with free will.
- If society could organize itself so that individuals faced a system of certain expectations of behavior and sanctions for behavior that violated the law, then people would choose not to commit crimes.

PRINCIPLES PROPOSED BY BECCARIA

1. '**Egalitarianism**' (that **all should be equal** before the law),
 2. '**Proportionality**' (that the **punishment should fit** the crime),
 3. '**Legality**' (the law should be used to define what is illegal; if an action was **not illegal** when it was committed, it should **not be punished**),
 4. '**Humanitarianism**' (the mildest punishments should be used to **achieve deterrence**).
- There is no doubt that **Beccaria's ideas influenced** those who developed policies regarding crime and punishment in many parts of the world in the **19th century**.

FACTORS AFFECTING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

1. **Situational and environmental** factors (lack of protection, lack of supervision, disadvantaged environment, etc.)
2. **Macro sociological** factors (unemployment, poverty, economic crisis, war, etc.)
3. **Family and developmental** factors (parental attitudes, abuse, neglect, home environment, etc.)
4. **Biological and physiological** factors (genes, chromosomes, brain trauma, hormonal changes, etc.)
5. **Psychological** factors (impulsivity, low empathy, antisociality, etc.)



THEORIES EXPLAINING SITUATIONAL and ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

- The physical environment affects criminality.
- According to the theory developed by Cornish and Clarke (1987), criminals **seek maximum reward** (profit) when considering committing a crime.
- The theory explains that criminals **calculate the perceived benefits and costs** of committing a crime (Lersch, 2007). This idea explains why some drug mules are willing to risk their lives; the benefits (payment) they will receive far outweigh the costs (of being caught).
- So how does the situation affect it? Experts explain that **the decision** to commit a crime **is initially determined psychologically**, and the **final decision** on whether to commit a crime against a specific target is **determined situationally** with a cost-benefit computation. For example, "Should I choose to break into this house or that house?" is a rational choice that involves a cost-benefit computation.

ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY

- According to the theory developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), for a crime to occur, the following must be present:
 1. a **motivated offender**;
 2. a **suitable target**;
 3. the **absence of a suitable monitor**
- This explains why people may steal expensive cell phones or laptops that have been left unattended. Cohen and Felson emphasize that **ordinary citizens** who watch each other and surrounding property are the **most effective monitors**.
- This theory looks at crime from the perspective of the offender. A crime will only be committed if the prospective offender believes that the **target is suitable** and that there is **no suitable monitor**. It is the offender's assessment of the situation that determines whether a crime will be committed.
- The theory explains how people's **routine activity patterns create opportunities** for criminal activity. For example, if a person routinely leaves home at 8:45 AM and returns home at 5 PM, this means that their home will be vulnerable from 8:45 AM to 5 PM each day.

BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

- Wilson and Kelling's (1982) theory explains how **less serious crimes** (neighborhoods without proper care, trash) and signs of disorder **reduce residents' desire to enforce social order**, which leads to more serious crime. If there is a broken window, it means no one is bothering, no one is watching, and no one cares. This leads to more crime by the criminal.
- The Broken Windows Theory suggests that **visible signs of disorder and neglect**, such as broken windows or graffiti, can **encourage more crime and antisocial behavior** in an area because they signal a lack of order and law enforcement.
- “Behaviors that are seen as unimportant also lead to a **breakdown in community controls**. A stable neighborhood with families who take care of their homes, look after each other's children, and frown on unwanted intruders can become a scary place in a few years or even months. Fights occur. Trash piles up. People start drinking in the street. Eventually, a drunk person collapses on the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep. "Pedestrians are approached by beggars. At this point, serious crimes or violent attacks against strangers are inevitable.”



THEORIES EXPLAINING MACRO SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY

- According to Shaw and McKay (1942), the **structure of society** is related to the **amount of crime** in society. **The more disorganized the society, the more crime there is.**
- High levels of **poverty and unemployment**, a **weak economy**, and a **poorly functioning educational system** are indicators of poor social organization, which can lead to higher levels of crime.
- Many macro-level studies show that a **good economy can reduce crime rates** across countries in two ways:
 1. People becoming more **engaged in work** (work is a **protective** factor);
 2. **Economic growth** often goes hand in hand with social structures and the **rule of law**, which help reduce crime rates.
- Social disorganization theory states that communities with **high population turnover, diverse populations, and poverty** are more likely to experience **high levels of crime** due to **weakened social ties**.

GENERAL STRAIN THEORY

- Agnew's theory (1992) focuses on a wide range of difficulties, including **failure to achieve various goals, loss of valuables**, and **negative treatment** by others.
- Everyone in society has some material and nonmaterial goals that they want to achieve but are unable to achieve because they **lack the opportunities** or have **poor family and peer support** (for example, poor family and antisocial peers are clear risk factors).
- **Crime and delinquency** result from the presence of **negative emotions** that result from a range of stressors, such as fear, frustration, depression, anger, and disappointment.
- The theory suggests that certain **stressors imposed on** members of society may **lead** certain individuals to engage in **criminal activities**. According to this assumption, some individuals may **resort to crime to avoid stress** and **reduce the stressors** they encounter.

SOCIAL CONTROL THEORIES

- Social control theories explain **why people obey rules and accept social control** (as opposed to other theories that explain why people break rules).
- These theories explain that crime is **exciting, enjoyable, and personally reinforcing** for those who commit it, and that most people would commit crimes if there were **no controls and checks** in society (Hirschi, 1969).
- Crime occurs in situations where there are no social controls to stop it (for example, **social security measures, marriage, and employment**) (Hirschi, 1969). **Internalization of moral rules** will limit the tendency to engage in deviant acts.
- The theory proposes that the strength of an **individual's ties or attachments to conventional society** prevents social deviance (Hirschi 1969; Simpson 1976). The **need to belong and be connected to others** is fundamental and influences many **behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes**.

DETERRENCE THEORY

- According to Becker's (1968) theory, crime is **dependent on the certainty, speed, and severity of punishment**. The **state** imposes this punishment.
- Deterrence works when people **avoid actions out of fear of negative consequences**. They also deter when the **calculated costs of punishment outweigh the benefits** of a criminal or deviant action.
- There are **two types** of deterrence. **General deterrence** is the deterrent effect that **punishment** has on **other potential offenders**. **Specific deterrence** is the effect that **punishments** have on **reducing the recidivism** of punished offenders (Blackburn, 1993).
- Deterrence suggests that punishments **not only punish violators but also deter other people** from committing similar crimes. (e.g., temporarily suspending the license of those caught driving under the influence of alcohol.)

LABELLING THEORY

- According to Becker's theory (1963), deviance is not a quality of an individual's actions; rather, it is a **result of the rules and sanctions** applied to a "criminal" **by others**. No action is inherently deviant; it becomes deviant **when people label** it as such.
- This theory examines the sources of labeling, **how criminals are labeled**, and the **impact of labelling** on individuals. The main idea here is that being labeled as a criminal negatively affects an individual, **diminishing** their **self-image** and **encouraging a criminal career** (Blackburn, 1994).
- Labeling theory shows that when society assigns labels to individuals or certain groups, it can have an **impact on their behavior**. In relation to sociology, criminology, and psychology, it has shown that labeling someone as a criminal can lead to deviant behavior.
- It argues that **no action is inherently criminal**, but results from actions that society deems deviant or that violate norms and create social problems. These norms are actually **created by powerful social groups**.

RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRIME

- **Age** and street crime are linked (peak age - 15 to 19 years) Street crime mostly occurs in **adolescence**. Most young people do not commit crime;
- A smaller group of individuals who **start offending early** tend to have **longer criminal careers**. There is a lifelong continuum of anti-social and criminal behaviour in this group;
- The **age-crime curve** has been observed in **both males and females**, but **declines** more rapidly in **females**;
- In contrast to the patterns seen in street crime, **occupational and profit-related crimes** (i.e. fraud and embezzlement) begin in **adulthood** because people tend to steal from businesses;
- **A small number** of individuals are responsible for the **majority of crimes**;
- Criminals commit a **variety of offences**;
- **Adolescents** commit crimes **with others**, while **adults** commit crimes **alone**;
- The **important 'risk factors'** relate to individual characteristics, **family, school and community** environments;
- **Working, getting married and having children** are linked to desistance from crime and are therefore '**protective**';
- As people get **older**, they become **less likely** to commit crimes.

THEORIES EXPLAINING FAMILIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

- Also known as **Developmental Criminology**, its studies include:
 - a. from **'cradle to grave'** development of crime;
 - b. the **impact of risk and protective factors** across ages;
 - c. the **effects of life events** on the course of human development (Farrington, Loeber & Welsh, 2010).





DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES



DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES



- Traditional criminological theories have sought to explain **differences in criminal behavior** among individuals, such as **why lower-class boys** commit more crimes than upper-class boys.
- Developmental criminological theories seek to explain **within-individual changes** in criminal behavior over time.
- Developmental criminological theories conduct **prospective longitudinal studies**.

TWO- PATH THEORY (MOFFITT, 1993)

- Moffitt (1993) proposed that there are **two qualitatively different categories of antisocial** people (differing in kind rather than degree):
- Life-long persistent offenders (LLP)
- Adolescent-limited offenders (AL).

ADOLESCENT-LIMITED OFFENDERS (AL)

- ALs have a **short criminal career** and are largely confined to their **teenage years**. They mostly commit "**rebellious**" crimes such as vandalism. Youth depression may push them to commit crime.
- They commit crimes because they cannot **obtain the rewards that adults have** in their teenage years or because of **peer influence**.
- ALs are expected to make rational decisions regarding crime (they weigh the possible costs against the possible benefits).
- They stop committing crimes when they enter **legitimate adult roles** and can **legally fulfill** their desires.
- They can **easily avoid** crime because they have **few neuropsychological deficits**.
- AL offenders exhibit **antisocial behavior only during adolescence**, start committing crimes around the **age of 18**, and although they may try to imitate LLPs, they usually **stop deviant or rebellious behaviors** when they continue their **education** or seek **employment**.

LIFE-LONG PERSISTENT OFFENDERS (LLP)

- LLPs begin committing crimes at an **early age** and continue to commit crimes **beyond their twenties**.
- They commit a **wide range of crimes**, including violence. They often **seek opportunities and victims**.
- LLPs are driven by **cognitive deficits, uncontrolled temperament, hyperactivity, poor parenting, broken families, teenage parents, poverty, and low socioeconomic status**.
- If **neuropsychological risks** are present, they are **compounded by a disadvantaged environment**.
- Criminal decision-making is not expected to be rational for LLPs (they make decisions **without thinking**, largely from a **well-learned, "automatic" behavioral repertoire**).
- LLPs are largely **motivated by profit**.

LIFE-LONG PERSISTENT OFFENDERS (LLP)

- LLP offenders begin to behave antisocially in **early childhood** and continue this behavior into **adulthood**.
- They engage in early 'acting out' behaviors from **the age of four** and tend to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (**ADHD**) and **learning disabilities**.
- As they grow older, they are **ostracized by their peers and parents** and often **end up in violent environments** and **foster homes**, further **exacerbating** their developmental risk factors.

TWO- PATH THEORY (MOFFITT, 1993)

- According to Moffitt (1993);
- There are **no real adult criminals**.
- People who are arrested or convicted for the first time as adults **have committed** crimes before **but have not been caught**.

	Risk factors		Protective factors
	Early onset (Ages 6 to 11)	Late onset (Ages 12 to 15)	
Individual factors	Drug, alcohol, and substance use Anti-social attitudes Being Male Aggression** Hyperactive Exposure to violence on media (TV and the Internet) Dishonesty	Drug, alcohol and substance use Anti-social attitudes Restlessness Inability to concentrate in school or work Risk-taking Aggression Being Male Physical violence Low IQ	Having a high IQ Being female Positive social orientation Intolerant attitude towards deviance and crime
Family factors	Low socioeconomic status Anti-social parents Harsh, lax, or inconsistent parenting Abusive parents Negligent parents Broken home	Low socioeconomic status Poor parent-child relationship Harsh or lax discipline Poor parental supervision Broken home Family conflict**	Warm supportive relationships with parents or other adults Parents' positive perception of peers Parental monitoring
School factors	Poor attitude towards school Poor performance	Poor attitude Poor performance Academic failure	Commitment to school and school activities
Peer and friendships	Weak social ties with others Anti-social peers	Weak social ties Anti-social peers Gang membership	Friends who are good role models and engage in conventional behaviour
Community		Neighbourhood crime Neighbourhood is disorganized	

FAMILY & DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

- **Poor parenting** skills, **battles** at home, **child abuse**, **low socioeconomic status**, **broken homes**, and **antisocial parents** are common **risk factors** associated with delinquency.
- There are also **protective** factors. **Supportive parenting** and **good parental supervision**, etc.
- Some factors are **static** and **cannot be changed**, such as being born male.
- Others are **changeable** (i.e. dynamic), such as **reducing/preventing youth** from being exposed to **substances** such as drugs and alcohol.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROPENSITY THEORY

- Lahey and Waldman (2005) aimed to explain the **development of conduct disorder** and **juvenile delinquency**, focusing particularly on **childhood and adolescence**.
- Their basic structure is **antisocial propensity**:
 - tends to **persist over time**,
 - has a **wide variety** of behavioural manifestations,
 - reflecting the **versatility and comorbidity** of antisocial behaviour.
- components of antisocial propensity
 1. **low cognitive ability**
 2. **prosociality** (negative)
 3. **daring**
 4. **negative emotionality**
- These four factors are said to have a **genetic basis**.
- Lahey and Waldman (2005) discuss **gene-environment interactions**.

INTERACTIONAL THEORY (THORNBERRY & KROHN, 2005)

- Thornberry and Krohn (2005) focus on factors encouraging **antisocial behaviour at different ages**.
- They suggest that the causes of antisocial behaviour **vary for children** who start at different ages.
- The most distinctive feature of interactional theory is its emphasis on **reciprocal causation**.
- **Late starters** (ages 18–25) will **show more continuity in antisocial behaviour** over time than earlier starters (ages 12–18) **because** the late starters have **more cognitive deficits**.
- Desistance was caused by changing social influences, protective factors and intervention programmes.

INTERACTIONAL THEORY (THORNBERRY & KROHN, 2005)

- the most important influencing factors:
 1. **(birth to 6):** neuropsychological deficits, difficult temperament, parenting deficits, structural adversity
 2. **(6–12):** neighbourhood and family factors
 3. **(12–18):** school and peer factors, deviant opportunities, gangs and deviant social networks
 4. **(18–25):** low intelligence and poor school performance



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Jones, D.W. (2008). *Understanding Criminal Behaviour: Psychosocial approaches to criminality*. Willan Publishing.
- Khader, M. (2019). *Crime and behaviour : an introduction to criminal and forensic psychology*. World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.
- Thio, A., Taylor, J.D., & Schwartz, M.D. (2019). *Deviant Behavior* (12th Ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.